

ORESTE SOLA
MAKING IT IN AMERICA (1901)

Buenos Aires, 17 August 1901

Dearest parents,

I have been here since the fifth of this month; I am in the best of health, as are my two companions. As soon as we got here, we went to the address of Godfather Zocco, who then introduced us to several people from Valdengo who have been in America for some years and are doing well more or less. The language here is Castilian, quite similar to Spanish, but you don't hear anyone speaking it. Wherever you go, whether in the hotel or at work, everyone speaks either Piedmontese or Italian, even those from other countries, and the Argentines themselves speak Italian.

This city is very beautiful. There is an enormous amount of luxury. There are some buildings beautiful beyond words, only five stories high, six at the most, but with ornamentation the equal of which you won't find in all of Turin. The most beautiful building is the water reservoir, built by the English, and, what is surprising, it is all marble for half its height but with certain small columns sculpted and decorated with exquisite workmanship. The other half of it is also enchanting; it occupies ten thousands square meters.

The Piazza Victoria [Plaza de Mayo] is also beautiful, where all around on two sides there are only banks. They are of all nations: English, French, Italian, Spanish, North American, etc., etc. On another side is the government building where the president of the Argentine Republic resides. He is Italian, Rocca by name, the third Italian president in a row who sits on the Argentine throne. There is also the railway station of the south, which is something colossal. With workshops, offices, and the station itself it will cover 1 million square meters. Now they are at work on a government building for the Congress [Parliament]. The architect was an Italian, as is the chief contractor, who is supervising all the work. It is a job that in the end will cost more than 700 million lire. It will occupy an area of a block that is ten thousand square meters and will be surrounded by a square, which, along with the building, will constitute an area of about 100,000 square meters. This work will be better than the first (the railway station), but perhaps I shall not be able to see it finished.

All of this is inside the city, but if you should go outside for a few hours, it's worse than a desert. You find only houses made solely out of mortar, with only a ground floor and a door you have to enter on all fours. Outside you don't see a plant; everything is desert. The plains stretch as far as the eye can see; it takes hours on the train before you come to the mountains. There are a few tracts of land, sort of green, where they may let a few horses loose to graze. Here they let the animals go out no matter what the weather might be. Here you can't find a rock, though you pay its weight in gold for it. All the ground is black like manure, thick and muddy. When it doesn't rain, it gets hard, and if you try to dig, it shoots out as if it were rock.

The food here is pretty good, but it doesn't have much flavor. This is true for all Argentina.

All the guys here are jolly crazy men. In the evening when we get together before going to bed we split our sides laughing. They would all like to go back to Italy, but they don't ever budge. Perhaps I will do the same. Here we eat, drink, and laugh and enjoy ourselves; we are in America.

Good-bye. You too should be happy as well as Mom that I am in America. Give a kiss to Narcisa and another to Abele. Tell him to study hard, that one who studies and is knowledgeable is greatly respected and sought after here.

Take one last loving kiss and hug from your always loving son,

Oreste.

Taken from Oreste Sola, "Making it in Argentina," in *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 188–190.